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ABSTRACT

Combining community participation in decision making with methods of social investigation, participatory research focuses on involvement of the subjects of the research in the research process. Adult educators are exploring this research method which, unlike quantitative research, serves the needs of individuals and not those of policy makers who need convenient, portable information and researchers who survive economically by collecting, packaging, and selling knowledge. Renewed attention has been brought to the weaknesses of the survey appoach, the most commonly used research method. It oversimplifies social reality and is therefore inaccurate; is often alienating, dominating, or oppressive in character; does not provide easy links to possible subsequent action; and uses methods which are not consistent with the principles of adult education. Work continues on finding alternative strategies, one of which is participatory research. This concept rests on the premises that a research process can immediately and directly benefit and is part of a total educational experience for the population involved in the entire dialectic process, that its object is the liberation of human creative potential and the mobilization of human resources for the solution of social problems, and that it has ideological implications. As an example, a Tanzanian village used this process to improve low-cost grain storage. (YLB)

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WORKING PAPER NO. 1

CREATING KNOWLEDGE: BREAKING THE MONOPOLY

Research Methods, Participation, and Development

by

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CREATING KNOWLEDGE:

BREAKING THE MONOPOLY

Research Methods, Participation and Development

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" ... People cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for an outsider to build a man's house, an outsider cannot give the man pride and self-confidence in himself as a human being. Those things a man has to create in himself by his own actions. He develops himself by what he does; he develops himself by making his own decisions, by increasing his understanding of what he is doing, and why; by increasing his own knowledge and ability, and by his own full participation--as an equal--in the life of the community he lives in."

(Julius Nyerere, 1973:60)

"Research is always and by logical necessity based on moral and political valuations, and the researcher should be obliged to account for them explicitly."

(Gunnar Myrdahl, 1970:74)

Background

Thinking about development, education and the role of social investigation has undergone dramatic shifts in the recent past. The "top down" concepts of education and development have been widely questioned. Emphasis has shifted from concepts of development based on urbanized expectations to the need to stimulate growth and change in rural areas. The importance and necessity of increased popular involvement in decision making in both rural and urban settings is accepted widely. Development is more and more seen as an awakening process, a process of tapping the creative forces of a much larger proportion of society, a liberating of more persons' efforts instead of a "problem" to be solved by the planners and academicians from afar.

Along with the shift in thinking about development has come a general questioning in all fields of social science about the relationship between the way in which research is conducted and the overall values the researcher holds. This discussion within the field of adult education has been particularly rich.

There are a growing number of adult education researchers who are exploring new methods. Kathleen Rockhill has suggested that adult educators' search derives from three primary perspectives:

> "(1) The concern that quantivative research methods are not providing an adequate understanding of complex reality;
>
> (2) The desire for 'practical' research that can be used as a base for setting policy and developing programs which will promote social justice and greater self-reliance;
>
> (3) A humanistic view of human behavior which sees individuals as active agents in their environments rather than as passive objects to be researched." (1976:1)

Purposes of Research

Most social science research done in the Third World (and elsewhere) is related to either of two purposes. Firstly, the need and desire of hierarchly-oriented administrators and policy makers to gather information from those who do not make decisions in order to make decisions for them. This operates at both the national level as government ministries go about the task of attempting to "solve" various problems of inequity and distribution brought about by development and at international levels by inter-governmental agencies attempting to offer solutions as well.

The second purpose related to the way in which research and social science mirrors economic structures. For a man working in a university or a research institution, knowledge is the only commodity available to sell. It is necessary to gather or "mine" ideas and information in order to survive economically. Priorities must be given to collecting data in a central point, summarizing it and then packaging it in such a way that journals, books, seminars, international conferences can make use of it. The need to serve policy makers is recognized as they represent an obvious market for the ideas. The need to serve the people from whom the information has been gathered (the unemployed, the villagers,

the students, the teachers) is indirect and by necessity of low priority. These groups will not buy the results (and perhaps didn't want the research in the first place).

The forms of research which have developed have been shaped by these purposes. Quantitative research has been an attempt to summarize social information in a form that is convenient and most importantly portable. This has been seen as a necessity as society has become more complex and as decision making has been pulled ever farther from most people's grasp. But this article is not an attack on numbers. Numbers in and by themselves are not the problem. There is now and will be a need for kinds of census-type information (although the absence of national statistics in so many fields in China gives rise to speculation about even this). The fundamental question is, who has the right to create knowledge? The vast majority of all social science research done anywhere in the world represent one aspect or another of either experimental designs, comparison of case studies, anthropological (participant observation) or survey methods of various kinds. Most of this work has been characterized by a desire for objectivity and scientific accuracy. All of these methods have been characterized by the focusing of analysis, problem and formulation and knowledge creation in the persons initiating the process.

Of these approaches, by far the most common is the survey approach which is based on a process of problem formulation, hypothesis construction, "instrument" construction (usually some form of interview or questionnaire), collection of data, analysis of data and interpretation of data. The persons from whom information is to be gathered are determined by information needed and by the "sampling" strategy employed. The last few years have brought renewed attention to the several shortcomings of the survey research approach. These shortcomings are based on a combination of frustrations,

changing concepts of development and a wider availability of research done by persons working in the Third World (either internationally or nationally).

What are the Weaknesses of the Most Commonly Used Research Methods?

1. The survey research approach oversimplifies social reality and is therefore inaccurate.

In addition to the arbitrariness of instrument construction or the class bias of such specific tools as semantic differential tests and various other tests devised by those who work from a primarily psychological base, these approaches have other weaknesses. A research process that extracts information from individuals in isolation from one another and aggregates this into a single set of figures does so at the expense or reducing the complexity and richness of human experience. Social responses to problems by groups of people are not necessarily the same as the total of individual responses of people acting alone. It is of course correct to say that the use and interpretation of the figures, "depends on the institutional and social context within which the research is embedded" (Carr-Hill, 1974:30). But even given an institutional framework that encourages popular participation or control of decision making, the representation of population needs by a set of figures such as "22 per cent of those interviewed said that their home environment has had the most influence on their career choice", or "42.16 per cent of teachers reports problems", is inadequate, and unsatisfactory. The illusion of accuracy through numbers has been long perpetuated by many of us at least partly as a way of hiding, obscuring or mystifying research.

A second way in which survey research oversimplifies is the perspective of the forced choice. Information is sought through interviews or questionnaires which provide a framework for the responses. For example, many questions ask

people what is "most influential", "least satisfactory" "first choice" or "most responsible" regarding some specific attitude or decision when attitudes, decisions and behavior do not reflect a single cause. The curious fact is that all of us have experience of this false choice. We have often filled in forms or questionnaires and have felt the desire to say, "that really isn't the right question". The forced choice approach reaches a fetish point in some educational research as was seen in one case where a "diagnostic tool" was being employed to help in the analysis of new adult students. Potential students of English were asked to choose the one form of literature in which they were most interested from a list that included novels, short stories, poetry, drama or non-fiction. Pity the person who either didn't know the difference between the forms (this is likely enough in modern literature), wanted some of all, or was curious about a specific period.

A third reason why one-time surveys oversimplify is their presentation of a static picture of reality, a photograph of a group of people with neither a past nor a future. The very fact that the survey is ahistorical is a severe limitation; social change is a continuous process, a dialectic or movement from one pole to another over time.

2. Survey research is often alienating, dominating or oppressive in character.

If one accepts Freire's point that teaching methods have ideological implications then the same holds true for research methods. If one is concerned with increasing people's capacity to participate fully and gain some degree of control over their lives, then research methods themselves can be part of this process as the article by Swantz shows. Questionnaires or interviews designed in an office of a university or adult education institution are by nature onesided. This process regards people as sources of information, as having bits of isolated knowledge, but they are neither expected nor apparently assumed able to analyze a given social reality. At the extreme, researchers

take up peoples' time with often badly formulated questions and make interpretations based on little experience in the area or social class the basis of programmes which are then expected to be useful and relevant.

Research approaches of this style often create the illusion among those who are the suppliers of information that research is rigorous, highly technical, scientifically "pure" and that the work can only be done by those who are university trained. The abilities of people to investigate their objective realities are not stimulated and the pool of human creativity is kept within narrow confines. Those most familiar with the problems and whose daily existence is affected by poor health, poor nutrition, low levels of production or past failures of educational provision are effectively taken out of the active process of making the changes which might lead to improvements. Control is left to those who by definition and levels of training are outside the experiences within which change is sought.

One example of this on a large scale was noted in the UNESCO evaluation of the Experimental World Literacy Programme. The emphasis on a large scale, internationally comparable survey design resulted in a situation where few national researchers were viewed as competent to carry out the type of evaluation needed. The resultant instruments were not only grossly over-simplifying the relationship of literacy to economic development (an admittedly narrow idea in any case) but went about it with a heavy handed manner. For example, "Under the general heading of transformation of the milieu, indicators were devised for testing changes in literates behavior in the following categories: means of production, volume of production, monetary income, income in kind, comsumption of durable goods. These indicators say virtually nothing about vital behaviors concerning social, political or cultural transformation even though pertinent data were available in certain project evaluations ... In one country where per capita GNP is less than $200, this consumption criteria was broken down into indicators that included safety razors and wrist watches."

3. Survey research does not provide easy links to possible subsequent action.

Much research in adult education is action oriented. It may be an attempt to determine a community's educational needs or an attempt to modify existing programmes through an evaluation/research process. In either case it expected that when changes are made the people in the community or the participants in the adult education programme will participate more actively, more efficiently or will gain increased benefits over what had existed before. Basic principles of planning stress that the likelihood of full and effective participation in any ventures--education, political or social--are improved by involving would-be participants in the decision-making process. In addition to resulting in a poor source of information, research which has alienated, or at best treated respondents as sources of primitive information, has little likelihood of creating the active and supportive environment essential for change.

4. Survey research methods are not consistent with the principles of adult education.

The arguments put forward so far would apply to a critique or research in social science generally. Within the field of adult education there are additional criteria to be met in selecting a research approach. To begin with, adult education is rooted to a concept of social justice and equality in a way in which other disciplines are not. Concern for the adult learner is often concern for the proportion of the population that has not had, for various reasons, an appropriate share of either national wealth or social services. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, adult education is directly linked to attempts to increase participation of citizens in national development and to provide a minimum level of basic education to all people.

A reading of any or all of the basic adult education texts such as Kidd, Knowles or Miller would produce a set of principles that would most likely include statements such as:

a) Programmes should be based on adult needs;

b) Adults, unlike children, are more easily able to articulate their learning needs;

c) Although there are changes with age in the ways in which adults learn, the phrase, "too old to learn" is a fallacy;

d) Adults work out often quite complex learning strategies to achieve desired goals on their own (Kidd, 1974; Knowles, 1971; Miller, 1964).

These principles, and many others, imply a faith in adults as whole persons participating actively in the world. It is no secret that the administration of actual programmes usually falls short of these principles; but such principles do exist and should serve as a basic guide for adult education research. John Holmes has suggested that if educational research had been working with adults instead of children, the concern with methods would have arisen much earlier as some adults at least are not passive and would not be as tolerant as school children and their teachers. (1976:150)

Instead, we find that the dominant research methods in use and the ones being picked up as adult educators begin to do more and more research are alienating, inaccurate as a means of identifying needs, and see some adults as marginal or incapable of articulating their own needs. Research in adult education is at an early stage of development. Within this specialization we still have time to select research approaches that suit us uniquely and thereby keep us one step ahead of other social sciences now going through the throes of discarding an antiquarian pursuit.

Alterantive Strategies

Some work has been done on finding an alternative approach. A general dissatisfaction with orthodox approaches has been expressed in the work of Mead and Blumer (Blumer, 1969). Qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, strategies have made their strongest entry with Glaser and Strauss, in The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967). Filstead's introduction in Qualitative Methodology provides a useful discussion substantiating the need for alternatives (1970). Pilsworth and Ruddock have described an alternative approach based on a phenomenological position (1975:33). Still other approaches have borrowed from anthropology and stress the value of participant observation (McCall and Simmons, 1969). Beltran has outlined convincingly the western bias in social science research methods (1976). Helen Callaway has similarly singled out the cultural trap which researchers are prey to when attempting allegedly objective research in non-western cultures (1976).

From Africa comes the work of Swantz and in some sense Malya with his approach to providing follow-up literacy material and investigation of a literacy environment (Swantz, 1974a, 1974b; Malya, 1975). In Latin America, Freire provides useful ideas in chapter three of Pedagogy of the Oppressed and a bit more in a talk given to the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania (1971, 1974). Vio describes some attempts at peasant participation in Chile under the Allende government (1975:70). Beltran and Gerace have developed important concepts of communication among peasants rather than to them (Beltran, 1976; Gerace, 1973). These concepts of "horizontal communication" are important links. In addition to Freire, Pinto has elaborated the forms of thematic investigation (1969). Within the field of sociology, the Oliveiras have put forward a compelling set of similar ideas in The Militant Observer: A Sociological Alternative (1975).

Participatory Research

The combination of community participation in decision making with methods of social investigation results in the concept of participatory research. The term refers to the efforts along several lines to develop research approaches which involve those persons who are the expected "beneficiaries" of the research. The term deliberately focuses on involvement of those who are traditionally the "researched" in formulation, collection of data (widely interpreted) and interpretation of information. There is on-going work by about 80 researchers in several countries with the support of the ICAE participatory research team to work further in both formal and informal ways to outline and test some of these concepts. Some of the guidelines which have been put forward to date are:

1. A research process can be of immediate and direct benefit to a community (as opposed to serving merely as the basis for an academic paper or obscure policy analysis).

Research cannot be justified solely as the basis for intellectual exercise or academic career building. It is important that the community or population gain not only from the results of the research, but from the process itself. This means, for example, that villagers or city dwellers should--as a result of participating in the research process--be more able to articulate problems themselves and to initiate processes to find solutions. In more concrete terms, the reports of the youth research in Tanzania by Swantz (1974b) and the agrarian reform work in Chile (Vio, 1975) stress the importance of the entire research team contributing to the productive work of the area. Such an approach has the added advantage of creating a better working atmosphere and providing a closer involvement with the community for the outside members of a research team.

2. A research process should involve the community or population in the entire research project from the formulation of the problem to the discussion of how to seek solutions and the interpretations of the findings.

Here we come to what is perhaps the fundamental principle of participatory research and its point of most radical departure from both orthodox research approaches and such improvements as grounded theory. The research process should be based on a system of discussion, investigation and analysis in which the researched are as much a part of the process as the researcher. Theories are neither developed beforehand to be tested nor drawn by the researcher from his or her involvement with reality. Reality is described by the process through which a community develops its own theories and solutions about itself.

3. The research process should be seen as part of a total educational experience which serves to establish community needs, and increase awareness and commitment within the community.

Research of this nature could be seen as a natural part of the educational planning or development planning process. It could be an accepted method of raising interest and increasing motivation rather than as a by-product of a research project which might or might not be picked up, depending on the circumstances surrounding the project.

4. The research process should be viewed as a dialectic process, a dialogue over time and not as a static picture from one point in time.

Roy Carr-Hill makes a compelling case for using questionnaires as consciousness raising instruments (1974). His point is that precisely because questionnaires are biased they can be used positively to create an awareness and to awaken in individuals powers of analysis which can then be brought to bear on the problem. I would agree with this point, but would

want to make certain that in a participatory research process several additional aspects are made clear. The first is that the questionnaire represents only the first stage of the analysis, the basis for several discussions and interactions with the respondents. Secondly, that the interpretation of the questionnaire data is also shared and is not done solely by a single social scientist. Thirdly, one would want any action based on the research process to be arrived at by more than a social scientist and his or her bureaucratic counterparts. The one-time questionnaires, even in the hands of someone who is "pro-people", remains a static and limited tool. It does represent a way of arousing initial interest in a social problem, especially in industrialized societies where community and group interaction is extremely limited.

5. The object of the research process, like the object of the educational process, should be the liberation of human creative potential and the mobilization of human resources for the solution of social problems.

This statement is a value, an underlying assumption for participatory research which will not suit everyone. But then this type of research will not perhaps be acceptable to a number of people in any case. The focus of research, learning and socio-economic development should be the same--man. The more intellectual power and creativity that can be brought to bear on society, the more likely a solution. We need not more highly trained and sophisticated researchers operating with ever more esoteric techniques, but whole neighbourhoods, communities and nations of "researchers".

An analogy to medicine is appropriate here. Social science research often appears to produce a situation in which a medical doctor tries to diagnose a patient's symptoms from around the corner and out of sight. The social scientist uses his "instruments" to measure the response of the patient as though they were a kind of long stethoscope. The focus of the

researcher has been on developing a better and better stethoscope for going around corners and into houses when the real need is for the researcher to walk around the corner, go into the house and begin talking with the people who live there.

6. A research process has ideological implication.

There are two points involved here: First is the re-affirmation of the political nature of all we do especially in adult education. Knowledge is power. A research process which allows for popular involvement and increased capacities of analysis may also make new political actions possible. At the same time it may be necessary at a certain time for the researcher to choose one group or another within the community to work with. The use of the term "participatory research" will not prevent someone from using similar methods to help a group of landlords work out a set of "tenant-tight" rules and living arrangements. It may be necessary to make the choice to work only for the tenants at an early stage. What is reality for landlords and perhaps even some government officials is not reality for tenants.

A Tanzanian Example

In June 1976, the Community Development Trust Fund began a process of participatory research in response to a local concern about spoilage of food after an unusually abundant harvest. The problem was seen very generally by the CDTF and other district officials as one of developing some kind of low cost grain storage. The usual pattern in Tanzania for development of this kind was to do some simple experimentation at a local agricultural research station and then "recommend" some model of grain silo to the local farmers. Success along these lines had not been consistent or inexpensive, hence the concern by CDTF in developing a new approach to the problem.

The premise for the new research process was that farmers already have a grain storage science. Grain storage is not a new problem and neither is local construction. What is new is attempting to build on this knowledge as the basis for analysis of grain storage improvement by those farmers themselves. It was felt that the process of analysis at a local level could be strengthened or stimulated by information from experiences in other parts of Tanzania and elsewhere. A combined analytic team was conceived that would be made up of farmers, political cadres and some "outsiders" with outside knowledge.

A committee was formed in the Ujamaa village with the village chairman as chairman of the grain storage problem as well. On the committee were local builders, local farmers, an artist, an outside grain storage specialist and a "technical" agronomist with knowledge of sprays and insecticides. The outsiders were selected for political as well as technical awareness.

The first discovery made by the committee was that not everyone in fact had a grain storage problem. The rich peasants had more than they needed, the poorer ones who worked for the most part as labourers for the larger farmers had a severe shortage. This meant that the design of silos needed to be done according to the needs of the three peasant classes in the village, not one design for all. Despite good initial discussions within the committee, little action in terms of experimentation by the farmers in the group took place until the openness and trust of the outsiders was proven. There had been some feeling (at least according to the reporters) that the outside "experts" would go along with the committee discussions and then push forward the model which they had been talking about all along (the "Nigeria" model in this case). The committee nevertheless rejected the Nigeria model in favour of some modified version of what they already had. The outsiders did not insist and a burst of activity and experimentation

ensued. At the end of the six-week period of analysis four or five substantially improved silos or methods were constructed. Visits were made to other villages nearby to discuss the findings of the research and the villagers presented a seminar to the Faculty of Agriculture staff at the University in Morogoro. These farmers were aware that they were experts in low-cost grain storage. They had created knowledge without the benefit of university degrees.

Conclusion

We have created and are still creating a situation in social science research which effectively denies recognition of knowledge creating abilities in most of the people of the world. In our search for ways of adding to the "body of knowledge" we have lost sight of the objectives of our work. For persons working in participatory research the importance of keeping a firm eye on one's values is crucial. Science is not a bag of tricks that one learns by being trained at ever increasing degrees of detachment from reality. We have created an illusion that we have come to believe ourselves; that only those with sophisticated techniques can create knowledge.

Participatory research is not a set of ideas than can be applied at random with predictable results. It is not neat, it cannot be rounded off to two decimal points and it is even difficult to make into charts. It does not eliminate the need to constantly evaluate political implications of one's work. What it does for those of us in education is to offer an alternative way of thinking about research which may suit both the needs of our work and our own values more closely.

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